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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the planning of an individualized education program as required by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, with particular emphasis on the education of deaf children. (SBH)

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# THE IEP AND DEAF CHILDREN

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March 21, 1978

by

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The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 can be considered legislation that has impact in at least three separate ways. It can, first, be considered an accountability measure, that, through its requirement for the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each handicapped child, mandates that public and private education agencies provide appropriate services to these children. Secondly, it is a funding act that provides financial support for the provision of special education services to handicapped children. It can also be considered a management act that describes how state , local and other education agenices will comply with its provisions.

The focus of this presentation will be on the IEP, the accountability measure of the act and how it can be viewed in relation to the education of deaf children.

We know that the law requires that, as of September 1, 1978, each handicapped child must have available to him/her a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The terms free appropriate public education are interpreted as meaning special education and related services that conform with the IEP.

The words Individualized Education Program connote specific concepts that have been described by Abeson and Weintraub (1977). The IEP is meant to address the needs of each individual child and not a class or group of children. Rather than to dictate the content or the process of the IEP for all deaf children (which would be difficult to say the least), it is probably more meaningful to raise issues, pose

questions and suggest special needs related to IEP's for the population of deaf children.

The requirement of the law that each handicapped child be educated to the maximum extent possible with children without handicaps must be considered carefully when developing an IEP for a deaf child. This should not be interpreted as an all or nothing proposition. In other words, should the deaf child be educated in the special school, most notably state residential schools for the deaf, or integrated fully into the regular classroom?

What about this decision to determine the placement of the hearing impaired child? What is most appropriate for these children? Definitions become important here. Let us first recognize that the words hearing impaired represent a wide spectrum of hearing loss described by various terms such as mild, moderate, severe, profound, hard of hearing and deaf. Each of these has a different meaning, but, when understood, helps to categorize the degree of a person's hearing loss. To describe each of them precisely now would take some time, but one should be aware that a variety of adjectives are used to explain hearing loss in an individual. The amount of hearing loss that an individual has will effect the development of speech and language. Generally, the greater the loss, the more difficulty one has developing speech and language.

In developing an IEP for a deaf child, it is best to consider a variety of educational settings that represent a continuum of options. The intent of the legislation is that all options be considered for each individual and that the most appropriate environment be

determined in the IEP conference by the student, when appropriate, the parents and representatives of the educational agency. These options include the special school, special class in the regular school, partial integration in the regular classroom with resource room or special assistance and full integration in the regular classroom.

In thinking about the IEP conference, we might ask ourselves a few questions. Is the deaf student involved in the conference as a meaningful participant? Does he or she understand what is happening? If not, is it because of the student's age, competence, or merely his mode of communication? Is there someone there who is skilled in communicating with the student and not just "easy to lipread", or someone who knows a few signs or can fingerspell a little? In reality, no one is "easy" to lipread. Some may be easier than others, but no one is "easy"! What about deaf parents attending an IEP conference? Have arrangements been made to provide an interpreter for them as required by the act? Does the interpreter have professional level skills?

Assuming the deaf student and his/her parents have been involved appropriately in an IEP conference, attention can then be turned to the IEP itself. We will also assume that, prior to the development of the IEP, a complete evaluation has been done by individuals trained and competent to evaluate deaf children. We will further assume that non-discriminatory testing in the student's mode of communication has been done and we now possess a complete analysis of the student's current level of educational performance. This may be too much to assume,

but we shall for the purposes of this discussion.

The needs of the student will then be determined and annual goals for each of these areas developed and prioritized. Commonly, the deaf student exhibits needs in many areas. In addition to the most common deficit, delayed speech and language development, progress is impeded in most academic areas. The IEP must prescribe instructional services that will assure improvement. The IEP may typically need to include such services as speech and language therapy, instruction using total communication, diagnostic and prescriptive evaluations, personal counseling, auditory training, and career education among others. We should emphasize that for the average deaf child, a combination of all of these services is necessary. Following development of the IEP an appropriate placement is sought.

We cannot limit ourselves to those services that are currently available, but must provide the deaf student with those services identified in the IEP. This is stated specifically in the act and is continuing to be a controversial topic.

Deafness is a unique handicapping condition. Because it deprives the individual of the sense of hearing, it also deprives him of that sense most needed to function in the average public school setting. If deaf students are to be educated in the regular classroom, special support services must be included in the IEP. Examples of these are interpreters, note-takers, trained tutors. Even with this degree of support, the deaf child's development in the social-emotional area may be seriously hampered unless the public school can develop a visual environment including, but not limited to, total communication

captioned films, interpreted or printed announcements and other visual aids. These services are equally important for the students who are partially integrated into the regular classroom or those who attend a special class in the regular school building. Where these services do not exist, alternative placement options must be considered.

Only after compiling all of these needs can the IEP be developed and an appropriate placement be determined.

The requirements for developing an IEP for a deaf child are the same as those for other handicapped children. There is no particular format that seems most desirable for deaf children. Some states have adopted a uniform format for developing IEP's. Others are leaving it up to the local school districts. Many commercial companies are offering "new and innovative" processes for developing IEP's.

One thing does seem clear. Because annual goals and short term objectives must be written in the IEP, it is easier to do this when a curriculum guide or a scope and sequence of curriculum materials exists that have been developed for a particular handicapped group. For example, if course guides or objectives are available that have been developed for deaf children, the task of developing the IEP is simplified. Where these materials do not exist, the goals and objectives will have to be developed "from scratch", in effect, a new curriculum will need to be written for each child.

## SUMMARY

It is important to recognize the severe nature of the handicap of deafness when developing IEP's for deaf children. Because of the nature of the handicap, different assessment techniques will be used

and different categorical needs will be identified. Based on these varied needs, a special prescription will be developed in the IEP. This special prescription will require careful consideration of the services available and the most reasonable placement among several options must be agreed upon by all the participants in the IEP conference.

## References

Abeson, Alan and Weintraub, Frederick. "Understanding the Individualized Education Program". A Primer on Individualized Education Programs for Handicapped Children. Edited by Scottie Torres. Reston, Virginia: Foundation for Exceptional Children. 1977.